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Thinking with Ourselves: Socrates' Philosophical Conscience in the *Hippias Major*

By

Leonardo Salvatore

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Faculty Advisor: Andrei Pop
Preceptor: Max Benjamin Smith

Day by day, she weaved the great web. And every night, with torches placed beside her, she unraveled it.[1]

[1] *Odyssey*, book II, lines 104-105. My translation.

In the *Symposium*, Alcibiades relates one of Socrates' rare solo meditations:

> One day, at dawn, he started thinking (συννοήσας) about some problem; he just stood outside, trying to figure it out. He couldn't resolve it, but he wouldn't give up. He just stood there, stuck to the same spot. By noon, many soldiers had seen him. They were quite mystified, so they told everyone that Socrates had been standing there all day, thinking about something. He was still there in the evening. After dinner some Ionians moved their bedding outside, where it was cooler and more comfortable (all this happened in the summer), but mainly to see if Socrates was going to stay there all night. And he did; he stood on the very same spot until dawn! He only left the next morning, when the sun rose, and he prayed to the new day.[2]

The use of συννοέω in its aorist participle is significant. By itself, νοέω can mean "to ponder," "to apprehend," or "to contemplate." The prefix συν (with, together, alongside) introduces a relation. The relation is not with a direct object (e.g., Socrates is thinking with some problem). The sentence's only object (τι) belongs to the present participle σκοπῶν. Rather, the relation is with and about the subject itself; that is, Socrates is "thinking with himself."

What does it mean for Socrates to think with himself? I will answer this question through a close reading of the *Hippias Major* and its "alter ego," an imaginary interlocutor of special and underappreciated significance. The alter ego has been characterized as the dialogue's main pedagogic device,[3] a paradigm of Socrates' "mimetic" method,[4] an ideal, philosophically mature Socratic interlocutor,[5] and an interpretive key to understand the historical and political consequences of Socrates' philosophizing.[6] Though revealing, these interpretations reduce the

[2] 220c-d. Except for occasional alterations, all translations of Platonic dialogues are from Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. John Cooper (Hackett Publishing, 1997).
[3] Franco Trivigno, "The Moral and Literary Character of Hippias in Plato's Hippias Major," in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy 50* (2016): 31-65.
[4] Mateo Duque, "An-other Socratic Method: Socratic Mimēsis in the Hippias Major," in *Plato Journal 25* (2024): 45-54. See also Duque, "In and Out of Character: Socratic *Mimēsis*," (Doctoral diss., The City University of New York, 2020), 266-269.
[5] Halsten Olson, "Socrates Talks to Himself in Plato's Hippias Major," in *Ancient Philosophy 20*, no. 2 (2000): 265-287. This essay was written by Sandra Peterson, who used a pseudonym for reasons discussed in Duque, "Socratic Method," footnote 17, 53-54.
[6] Santiago Ramos, "The *Hippias Major* and Political Power," in *Mouseion: Journal of the Classical Association of Canada 15*, no. 3 (2018): 405-427.

alter ego to either an intriguing but ultimately ornamental literary device or a pedagogical means to an end that could be accomplished otherwise.

This thesis aims to deepen the case for the alter ego's value by arguing that it is best understood as depicting Socrates' philosophical conscience. I borrow the term "conscience" from Hannah Arendt for reasons I will clarify in due time.[7] For now, suffice it to say that conscience denotes the dialogical nature of thinking. Arendt suggested that, "instead of repeating what we learned from Aristotle, that Socrates was the man who discovered the 'concept,' we should ask ourselves what Socrates did when he discovered it."[8] Whatever Socrates did, it involved thinking. Arendt thought the alter ego especially useful to understand the inner workings of Socrates' thinking mind, and, I would add, the validity of his acts of conceptual formation. Accordingly, I suggest we follow Arendt in approaching the *Hippias Major* as a portrayal of a thinker at odds with himself, not despite his logical acuity but *because* of it.

The paramount concern of Socrates' philosophical conscience is the search for truth. The alter ego illustrates the ineluctably dialogical nature of this continuous search. This depiction contributes to our understanding of what it means for Socrates to think with himself in at least two ways. First, it offers a glimpse into the affective consequences of Socrates' intellectual inquisitiveness on himself. A close reading of Socrates' reactions to the alter ego enables us to spell out similarities and fundamental differences between him and his interlocutors. Thinking like Socrates entails a continuous willingness to endure disorienting paralysis, accompanied by the resolve to overcome that paralysis.

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[7] "Thinking and Moral Considerations: A Lecture," in *Social Research 38*, no. 3 (1971): 417-446. For a recent discussion of Arendt's notion of conscience that mentions the *Hippias Major*, see Mika Ojakangas "Arendt, Socrates, and the Ethics of Conscience," in *Hannah Arendt: Practice, Thought and Judgement. Studies across Disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences 8* (2010): 67-85.
[8] Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations," 430.

Second, the alter ego's fierce concern with propositional knowledge yields meaningful differences with respect to Socrates' *daimonion*, conventionally understood as the paradigm of Socrates' conscience. Both the alter ego and the *daimonion* regulate behavior and are thus ethical. The alter ego, however, stresses the need to refrain from uttering propositional judgments, while the *daimonion* typically issues injunctions to forego physical, social, or political activities. Whereas Socrates links the *daimonion* to divination and action, and only rarely and vaguely to speech, the alter ego is stripped of divine connotations and almost exclusively concerned with theoretical knowledge as the product of discourse.[9] If the *daimonion* is Socrates' moral conscience, the alter ego is his intellectual, or philosophical, conscience. To think like Socrates is to engage and develop this philosophical conscience.

In short, my intended contribution is to show that and how, despite its disputed authenticity, the *Hippias Major* enriches our understanding of what it means for Socrates to think with himself, and for us to think like Socrates. Part I contextualizes this contribution by outlining the equivalence of thinking and dialogue in two well-known passages from the *Sophist* and the *Theaetetus*. Socrates' characterization of thinking as the soul's conversation with itself and his corollary description of judgment as the end of conversation can help define the alter ego's role as a forceful champion of conversation and an adamant enemy of judgment.

Fictional anonymous interlocutors like the alter ego appear in several dialogues. These "absent questioners" perform the same pedagogical function as the alter ego, though their role and significance are more limited and less revealing. To stress the alter ego's uniqueness, part II turns briefly to the absent questioner in the *Meno*, which offers a fruitful comparison because Socrates identifies with him, as he does in the *Hippias Major*. In the *Meno*, Socrates exploits this

[9] I say "almost" exclusively because a few passages in the *Hippias Major* suggest that the alter ego is concerned with Socrates' behavior outside and beyond philosophic exchanges. See footnote 166.

identification to emphasize the role of friendship in dialogue, which offers a further contrast with the ironic and antagonistic tones between Socrates and the alter ego.

Part III first summarizes the preamble of the *Hippias Major* and then introduces the alter ego. I discuss the alter ego's physical and temperamental features as described by Socrates and Hippias. The alter ego is portrayed as an aggressive, derisive, and fear-inducing figure at odds with the docile and friendly absent questioner of the *Meno*.[10] Part IV outlines Socrates' 4-stage response to the alter ego, which bears significance on the alter ego's character. Although his vivid characterizations suggest that the *Hippias Major* portrays a philosophical conscience sustained by fear and shame at bad arguments, I argue that they should be attributed to the dialogue's dramatic context. The 4-stage response further suggests that thinking like Socrates entails a continuous willingness to endure disorienting paralysis, accompanied by the resolve to overcome that paralysis. Part V addresses the alter ego's multivalence. I review relevant literature on its role and significance. I also comment on the alter ego's relationship to Hippias and what it reveals about its value for the orator's sake.

Part VI finally turns to Arendt's interpretation of the alter ego as a prototype of conscience, whose suggestiveness and shortcomings I discuss with respect to my textual analyses. If extended with a more precise treatment of the alter ego's presence before, during, and after Socrates and Hippias' conversation, a more nuanced discussion of the differences and similarities between the alter ego and the *daimonion*, and a positive conception of the philosophical conscience's constructive dimension, Arendt's framework can allow us to uncover the full significance of the alter ego *qua* representative of Socrates' thinking mind.

[10] I define Socrates' "irony" loosely as saying what he does not mean. This definition corresponds to Vlastos' "simple irony." "Socratic Irony," in *The Classical Quarterly 37*, no. 1 (1987): 31.

A Note on Authenticity

Although Paul Woodruff claimed that "the dust has now settled on the dispute over the [*Hippias Major*]'s authenticity, and little support remains for the negative side," the debate continues.[11] Authenticity, however, is only significant vis à vis the *Hippias Major*'s role in the development of Plato's thought. *Pace* Lee, I do not think that "what modern readers are to make of the [*Hippias Major*] overall depends to a great extent on the position taken on the more controversial questions of authenticity, authorial intention, and philosophical interpretation."[12] That is true if and only if the dialogue is treated in relation to the development of Plato's doctrines, as it often is, not least for its apparent formulation of a proto-doctrine of the Forms.[13]

Questions of authenticity have been responsible for what David Sider diagnosed as "a neglect [of the *Hippias Major*] that far surpasses that of the other minor but undeniably genuine dialogues."[14] In his 1991 monograph on the dialogue, Ivor Ludlam articulated a similar view, suggesting that debates about authorship have effaced its literary and philosophical value.[15]

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[11] Paul Woodruff, "Socrates and Ontology: The Evidence of the Hippias Major," in *Phronesis 23*, no. 2 (1978): 102. Two recent discussions of authenticity are David Lee, "The *Hippias Major*," in *The Platonic Mind*, eds. Peter D. Larsen and Vasilis Politis, 58-68 (Routledge, 2024); and Justin Clark, *Plato's Dialogues of Definition: Causal and Conceptual Investigations* (Springer International Publishing, 2022), chapter 8, 173-189.

[12] Lee, "*Hippias Major*," 67-68. See also Alex Long, *Conversation and Self-Sufficiency in Plato* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 47.

[13] E.g., Michael L. Morgan, "The Continuity Theory of Reality in Plato's Hippias Major," in *Journal of the History of Philosophy 21*, no. 2 (1983): 133-158; Paul Woodruff, "Socrates and Ontology," 101-117; David Sider, "Plato's Early Aesthetics: The *Hippias Major*," in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 35*, no. 4 (1977): 465-470; R. E. Allen, *Plato's* Euthyphro *and the Earlier Theory of Forms* (Humanities Press Inc., 1970), especially chapter 3; John Malcolm, "On the Place of the Hippias Major in the Development of Plato's Thought," in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie 50*, no. 3 (1968): 189-195; and Marion Soreth, *Der Platonische Dialog* Hippias Maior (C. H. Beck, 1953). For discussion of 19th-century and early 20th-century debates, see Holger Thesleff, "The Date of the Pseudo-Platonic Hippias Major," in *Arctos-Acta Philologica Fennica 10* (1976): 105-117.

[14] Sider, "Plato's Early Aesthetics," 75.

[15] Ivor Ludlam, Hippias Major: *An Interpretation* (Palingenesia, 1991), Introduction. Ludlam emphasizes the dialogue's dramatic dimension, though he also pays close attention to its formal arguments.

While Ludlam examined the *Hippias Major* on its own terms and without reference to the Platonic corpus, I will consider it in relation to pertinent dialogues, an endeavor that remains possible notwithstanding authenticity. Even if we assume Plato is not the author, the *Hippias Major* "may still give authentic evidence of Socrates."[16] Disputed authenticity may even be an advantage. If inauthentic, the dialogue would offer a depiction of Socrates that, though certainly influenced by Plato, affords us freedom to consider it without having to reckon with authorial intent and its implications for discerning anything meaningful about Socrates, real, fictional, or otherwise.

I. Thinking as Talking: Inner Dialogue and Judgment

In the *Sophist*, the Eleatic Visitor defines thinking (διάνοια) as "the soul's conversation (διάλογος) with itself."[17] In the same sentence, judgment (δόξα) is defined as "the conclusion of thinking."[18] A thinking soul converses with itself. Its conversation concludes when the soul settles on a definitive claim about the topic at hand; that is, a judgment. A similar conception of the soul's "inner dialogue" appears in the *Theaetetus*, where Socrates describes thinking (διανοεῖσθαι) as a "talk which the soul has with itself about the objects under its consideration."[19] When one thinks, one's soul is "conversing with itself, asking itself questions and answering, affirming and denying."[20] This description follows a strained and unsuccessful attempt to explain false judgment. Socrates suggests to Theaetetus that false judgment arises when one makes a

[16] Arendt, "Thinking and Moral Considerations," 443.
[17] 264a.
[18] 264b. I am aware that δόξα can also be translated as "belief," and that belief and judgment require a more nuanced discussion whose results would complicate these preliminary claims. For the sake of argument, I am treating the two interchangeably. I simply wish to show that thinking as inner dialogue is implicated in the assertion of any claim, be it about material objects or conceptual entities.
[19] 189e.
[20] 189e-190a.

judgment by substituting one item for another.[21] When one substitutes, "one misses the object he was aiming at and might fairly be said to hold a false opinion."

Socrates is not happy with this account. He begins to criticize it by invoking his notion of thinking as dialogue. Whenever one opines that one thing is another, he "says to himself" as much.[22] If one forms opinions of, say, an ox and a horse, one could not "say to himself seriously and try to persuade himself" that an ox is a horse, or vice versa. One could say those words in a syntactically sound sentence, but the equivalence would be obviously erroneous. Moreover, Socrates wants to show that making a judgment about any two items implies holding opinions about both. To claim that an ox is a horse, one must already have an opinion about what an ox and a horse are. But if one does, one will never mistake the two, for the correspondence is palpably fallacious.

Socrates therefore discards the account of false judgment as substitution. Yet, he retains his notion of thinking as talking to oneself, which he invokes again later. This move seems to imply that the soul's conversation with itself is essential to any conception of true and false judgment. Thinking—the soul's dialogical activity—precedes and enables judgment. To settle on any judgment at all, the soul must entertain hypothetical judgments and verify their plausibility. Socrates' consideration of the ox and the horse exemplifies this process. Indeed, Socrates is showing Theaetetus what a commitment to the soul's internal conversation entails in practice. By stressing the private dimension of the soul's inner dialogue, Socrates implies to Theaetetus that what they are doing together is to happen also in the privacy of their minds.[23]

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[21] 189b-c.
[22] 190a.
[23] 196a. For a discussion of this passage, including its implications for interpersonal conversation, see Long, *Conversation and Self-Sufficiency*, chapter 6, especially section I, 110-116. Long provides thorough reflections on whether or not interpersonal conversation is necessary for a Socrates-like figure who can seemingly think about everything he needs without engaging others. I agree with Long that some dialogues,

There are no better places to see this framework at work than the early aporetic dialogues, where Socrates is staunchly committed to scrutinizing δόξα.[24] Socrates often begins his inquiries with an explicit statement of interest: he wants to understand whether or not his interlocutors' beliefs are indeed true.[25] This statement of interest in others' putative knowledge is predicated on an admission of ignorance, which prompts Socrates to search for conversation partners in hopes that they may possess and be able and willing to share with him the knowledge he seeks.[26] As Euthyphro, Meno, and his many other interlocutors eventually realize, Socrates' relentless inquiry does not aim at producing new beliefs for them, at least not as a first order of business. He undermines his interlocutors' unexamined beliefs by exposing and underscoring inconsistencies between them and their premises. The interlocutors predictably realize that, at

among which we count the *Hippias Major*, suggest that inner dialogue is both more fruitful than interpersonal conversation and sufficient for one to inquire into the truth, while others, like the *Protagoras*, clearly demonstrate that interpersonal conversation is necessary to actualize the full potential of philosophical inquiry, not least because it affords the thinkers involved a wider horizon of hypotheses to share and assess. Arguments about the necessity of interpersonal conversation are beyond my scope. *Pace* Long, I would stress the dialogues' dramatic context as the main reason for the tension between internal and interpersonal conversation. Every dialogue unfolds in different circumstances, including the background and temperamental dispositions of the speakers involved. These circumstances define Socrates' argumentative strategy.

[24] I am counting *Charmides*, *Crito*, *Euthydemus*, *Euthyphro*, *Hippias Major*, *Hippias Minor*, *Ion*, *Laches*, and *Lysis* as early dialogues. *Gorgias* and *Protagoras* may also be said to belong to this loosely formed group. Socrates may be said to do the same in the middle and later dialogues, though his distinctive style of questioning fades in favor of more programmatic (but still technically dialogical) inquiries. A noteworthy exception is the *Theaetetus*, usually considered a middle dialogue, where Socrates seems even more committed to admitting his ignorance than in shorter and earlier dialogues, hence his self-proclaimed role as a midwife. The chronological category is not as important as the presence of Socrates' question-based method, which, not accidentally, is most marked in episodes that feature unambiguous admissions of ignorance.

[25] E.g., *Laches* 181d.

[26] *Apology* 21b-c is the most cited example, though Socrates pleads ignorant in virtually every dialogue (e.g., *Euthyphro* 6b, *Charmides* 165b-c, *Theaetetus* 150c). Socrates' admissions of ignorance sometimes appear at the beginning of a conversation and could plausibly be understood as a strategy to prompt wary interlocutors to engage. As Vlastos noted, however, they often come too late in a conversation to serve as encouragement ("Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge," in *The Philosophical Quarterly 35*, no. 138 [1985]: 1-31). The first profession of ignorance in the *Hippias Major* does appear right before the investigation of the καλόν begins formally with an explicit statement of inquiry. Socrates' profession is rather vague. It is also introduced through the alter ego, whose entrance seems to provide Hippias more encouragement than Socrates' putative ignorance.

least in the moment, they do not possess the knowledge they professed; that is, they are ignorant. This realization produces discomfort, vexation, and, in extreme cases, flight.[27] Sometimes Socrates proposes alternatives aimed at correcting the interlocutors' beliefs, and sometimes he is happy to just show his interlocutors that their claims are inconsistent. In interactions with interlocutors who do not profess to know, Socrates more easily convinces them that a proposition is true.[28] Yet, when they agree, he immediately undermines the claim, dragging them back into an uncertainty he shares.[29] These abrupt negations of what seemed like good approximations of the truth betray a crucial fact about Socrates' attitude towards inquiry: the apparent conclusion of an inquiry is always provisional; it always deserves further scrutiny, even if it seems to have finally yielded a claim worth accepting as final.[30]

In other words, the Socrates of aporetic dialogues operates on the assumption that any judgment *could* be wrong. This impression becomes manifest through Socrates' staunch rejections of seemingly satisfactory claims. Insofar as judgment denotes certainty about a given query, truth is a judgment, for truth must be certain. That does not mean every judgment is true; but only that whatever truth is, it is expressed in a judgment. The logical consequence of Socrates' commitment to philosophical inquiry as the path to truth is that we should never want conversation to end, lest we deprive ourselves of the possibility of discovering the truth.

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[27] A stock example of flight is Euthyphro in the eponymous dialogue. Examples of vexation are Meno and Anytus in the *Meno*. The latter's frustration with Socrates' intrusive and inappropriate questions leads him to threaten legal repercussions. As I discuss below, the conclusion of the *Hippias Major* also shows vexation on the part of Hippias, whose outright reluctance to continue dialogical inquiry in the name of his preferred alternative (i.e., speechmaking) provides a sharp contrast with Socrates and his alter ego.

[28] This is especially the case with younger and less experienced interlocutors like Lysis, Menexenus, and Alcibiades. A similar episode occurs in the *Hippias Major* (296a).

[29] E.g., *Lysis* 218c-d.

[30] This dissatisfaction may be said to be "gradual," in that Socrates sometimes expresses excitement about the potential results of a discussion, while sometimes standstills make him feel slight (but never total) discouragement, usually because his interlocutor is unwilling or not willing enough to engage in dialogue (i.e., Callicles in the *Gorgias*).

However, interpersonal conversation is bound to time and space. It must end eventually. Yet, not *all* conversation must end. Socrates can continue inquiring into whatever questions preoccupy him by and with himself. To put it in the language of the *Sophist* and the *Theaetetus*, the search for true judgments can always continue through the soul's soundless dialogue.

On the one hand, this constant commitment to thinking has a positive value. It generates inquiry, enables the assessment of judgments, and immunizes one against falsehood. The more consequential the judgment, the more significant the inquiry becomes.[31] On the other hand, it has a negative value. It precludes action, as in Alcibiades' vignette. When Socrates sits outside, pondering a problem day and night, he is not *doing* anything, insofar as doing entails bodily movement. He does not eat, remove his armor, or tidy up his tent. He is completely still for almost a full day. By contrast, the Ionians are walking back and forth to check if he moved at all. They roam the camp, move their beds, and do whatever else Greek soldiers did in preparation for battle. Socrates' immobility does not imply that he falls short of his duties as a soldier. Alcibiades' praises of his performances on the battlefield suggest that he took his military duties as seriously as his thinking.[32] It does imply, however, that, as long as Socrates thinks, he also removes himself from his immediate circumstances.

This tension between thinking and doing is vividly explored in the *Hippias Major*, where the alter ego scolds Socrates for making a conceptual faux pas, forcing him to leave a social setting. The closest analogues to the alter ego are the "absent questioners." Like the alter ego, these imaginary anonymous interlocutors are extensions of Socrates' mind. They, too, serve a

[31] The *Euthyphro* is a case in point: Euthyphro is about to prosecute his father in the name of piety. His revealed ignorance about piety has stark implications. Euthyphro's commitment to prosecute is no less staunch at the end of the dialogue, despite his occasional admissions of ignorance. That we could act on certain principles about which we are ignorant is evident. The issue is whether we should.
[32] *Symposium* 221a-c.

pedagogic function, though their role and significance is more limited. To better appreciate the alter ego's distinctness, we ought to first consider one simple but instructive example of an absent questioner.

II. The Absent Questioner in the *Meno*

Occasionally, Socrates invokes imaginary interlocutors as conversation aids.[33] These "absent questioners" are neither real nor fictional.[34] They are not real in that they have no identity besides the identity Socrates fabricates for them. Even that is not much: "someone," "a man," and equally vague descriptions are all he affords them. Yet, the absent questioners are not completely fictional, in that their interventions in the conversation emulate a real person: Socrates. Even though he presents them as anonymous third parties with no relation to him whatsoever, Socrates uses the absent questioners as mouthpieces for questions he wants to ask.[35]

[33] *Cf*., the imaginary speaker in *Gorgias* 451a-452d, the atheist in *Laws* 893b, Socrates' allusion to Meletus in *Euthyphro* 5b, the anonymous denier of absolute beauty in *Republic* 479a, and even Diotima's interventions in the *Symposium* (210a-212c). *Pace* George Grube, I would distinguish these examples from the Laws in the *Crito* (50a-54c), the "Protagoras" speech in the *Theaetetus* (166a-168c), and Aspasia's speech in the *Menexenus* (236d-249c) on the grounds that the former examples are more clearly didactic ("On the Authenticity of the Hippias Major," in *The Classical Quarterly 20*, no. 3-4 [1926]: 136). They are part and parcel of a dialogic exchange, be it between Socrates and a real interlocutor like Euthyphro or between Socrates and an imaginary interlocutor like Diotima; whereas the Laws, Socrates-as-Protagoras, and Socrates-as-Aspasia interrupt conversation for the sake of delivering an oration, albeit one aimed at deepening the inquiry. Unlike the Laws and Socrates-as-Aspasia, Socrates-as-Protagoras is clearly not meant to offer the last word. In this regard, Diotima is closer to the Laws and Socrates-as-Aspasia in that she seems intent on offering conclusive statements, down to adopting Athenian male assumptions about the desirability of boys. More can be said about the distance between the content of Socrates' interlocutors and his own claims, which, if he ever has any, he disguises as someone else's. Something similar happens in the *Hippias Major*. The important point is that, to varying degrees, Socrates' imaginary conversations mimic his inner dialogue, though the imaginary interlocutors are never explicitly identified as Socrates himself. See also Duque, "An-Other Socratic Method," 46.

[34] To my best knowledge, a systematic analysis of absent questioners in the corpus has yet to be conducted. See Trivigno, "Moral and Literary Character," footnote 32, 48.

[35] I discuss the pedagogical merits of this strategy below.

Indeed, Socrates often has them repeat questions he already asked, which evidently did not manage to lead the interlocutor to the answers he was searching.

The *Meno* is a case in point. When Meno admits he can no longer understand Socrates' reasoning, Socrates tries to help him by introducing "someone" who asks Meno a similar question to the one that got him stuck.[36] For a short while (74b-75e), Socrates introduces most of his queries as the absent questioner's. He eventually likens himself to the questioner, who complains that Meno is unable to differentiate between "the many" (i.e., shapes, colors) from "that which applies as much to the round as to the straight and which you call shape."[37] Before the absent questioner disappears, Meno adopts Socrates' strategy: "if some one said he did not know colour, and was in the same difficulty about it as about figure, what answer do you suppose would have come from you?"[38] Socrates replies that he would say the truth (τἀληθῆ). An important qualification follows:

> if my questioner were one of those clever and disputatious debaters, I would say to him: 'I gave my answer; if it is wrong, it is your job to refute it.' But if we were friends (φίλοι), like you and me, and chose to discuss together (διαλέγεσθαι), I should answer in a milder tone more suited to dialectic (διαλεκτικώτερον).[39]

Here Socrates opposes dialogical conversation to "clever and disputatious debaters." The debaters ask questions, but their approach to answering differs. They are engaged in eristic, which is agonistic (ἀγωνιστικῶν) in nature, for it results in a winner and a loser. Socrates presents the debater as one who can refute a claim by himself, or at least as one who believes he can do so. His goal is to refute claims, show off his learning, and undermine his opponents. That

[36] 74b: "If someone asked you what I mentioned just now: 'What is shape, Meno?' and you told him that it was roundness, and if then he said to you what I did: 'Is roundness shape or a shape?' you would surely tell him that it is a shape?"
[37] 74d: "if, then, he, like me, pursued the argument."
[38] 75c.
[39] 75c-d.

is not the same as wanting to assess a claim's putative veracity by probing it with questions, which is what friends engaged in conversation should want to do. The friends' interactions are competitive insofar as they demand effort, scrutiny, and the willingness to "lose" a proposition after it is deemed unsound. But they are not agonistic, in that friends do not seek to win against each other by refutation. This brief tangent reminds Meno that the stakes are not as he assumed. Socrates is not trying to win against him. He rather wants to understand what Meno thinks about the nature of virtue, a subject about which the general professed to know something. The very notion of an opponent is foreign to dialogue, at least in this brief presentation.

In the *Meno*, then, the absent questioner serves a pedagogical purpose. He is introduced to help Meno understand a subtle but crucial distinction between particulars (i.e., a shape) and universals (i.e., shape itself).[40] Socrates' statement about friendship applies to Meno and Socrates, though it extends as well to the absent questioner, who is now part of the conversation and its internal dynamics. Indeed, the statement follows a question about how to best answer the absent questioner, who receives the same friendly treatment Socrates tries to elicit between Meno and himself.

Admittedly, however, the absent questioner of the *Meno* does not add much to the interaction. Even as a pedagogical device, his value is moot. Socrates could ask the same questions without resorting to the anonymous questioner, as he had been doing up to that point. He could also share his distinction between eristic and dialogue without the absent questioner. Yes, the absent questioner resolves the stalemate Meno announced at 74b. But his presence is limited to two Stephanus sections, his interventions are confined to a technical discussion, and he disappears as swiftly and quietly as he appeared.

[40] This is the same issue that prompts Socrates' introduction of the alter ego in the *Hippias Major*.

The same cannot be said of the *Hippias Major*, whose alter ego embodies a more developed and insightful absent questioner. Socrates uses the alter ego as a pedagogical device, a point to which I return below. Unlike any other absent questioner, however, the alter ego plays a central role in the inquiry, is characterized extensively by both Socrates and Hippias, is identified as Socrates (by Socrates), and is described as an entity whose significance extends beyond the text.[41] I now address these points in turn to begin unraveling the alter ego's significance.

III. Socrates's Alter Ego

The alter ego's introduction follows a seemingly disjointed preamble.[42] Hippias has just returned to Athens after a long expedition in the Western Peloponnese. Socrates greets him with two compliments—fine (καλός) and wise (σοφός)—of which the former foreshadows the

[41] Vlastos counted the *Hippias Major* as one of four early dialogues that, unlike their counterparts, "display a pattern of investigation whose rationale" Socrates inspects openly ("The Socratic Elenchus: Method Is All," in *Socratic Studies*, ed. Myles Burnyeat, 1-38 [Cambridge University Press, 1993]). The other three dialogues are *Euthydemus*, *Lysis*, and *Menexenus*. For one, Socrates and Hippias' treatment of numbers, singularity, and multiplicity in the context of Socrates' attempted definition of beauty as the pleasure that comes through seeing or hearing can be read as a discussion of the dialogical nature of thinking and its relationship to community. So Hans-Georg Gadamer, who saw that excursus as an analogy between number and *logos* with fundamental implications for understanding the relationship between knowledge and community (*Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato* [Yale University Press, 1980], especially chapter 6). For discussion that builds on but ultimately diverges from Gadamer, see John Garner, "Gadamer and the Lessons of Arithmetic in Plato's Hippias Major," in *Meta: Research in Hermeneutics, Phenomenology, and Practical Philosophy 9*, no. 1 (2017): 105-136, especially section IV. Allusions to Socrates' method also appear at 301c and 304a-b.

[42] I outline the preamble here for the sake of context, though I treat its underappreciated significance in the Conclusion. The earliest treatment of the alter ego is Dorothy Tarrant, "The Authorship of the *Hippias Major*," in *Classical Quarterly 21*, (1927): 82-87. Elsewhere, Tarrant suggested that the alter ego is curious and ineffective, and that its uniqueness suggests the dialogue's spuriousness (*The* Hippias Major [Cambridge University Press, 1928], xiii). Grube recognized several parallels with other dialogues ("Authenticity," 136). Trivigno is correct in claiming that "Socrates is quite often appealing to absent interlocutors" and that "nowhere else is Socrates himself that absent interlocutor" ("Literary and Moral Character," footnote 32, 48; see also previous footnote). *Contra* Tarrant, Woodruff noted that the alter ego's uniqueness makes it "least likely to have been supplied by an imitator of Plato" (*Hippias Major*, 286c ad loc.).

dialogue's central theme.[43] The irony in Socrates' comments becomes increasingly clear as Hippias answers Socrates' queries about his endeavors. When asked about the reason for his absence, Hippias says that Athens often requests his services. According to the orator, Athenians deem him "the ablest citizen to judge and relay messages from various cities."[44] Although he just returned from Elis, most of his trips are to Sparta, where he administers the "greatest affairs."[45] Socrates takes advantage of this self-assuredness to subtly poke the orator's conceit. He again comments on Hippias' "wisdom" (σοφία), this time linking it to the orator's ability to make money in public and private, a skill Hippias happily endorses. Socrates also asks for Hippias' opinion about the reluctance of "people who are still famous for wisdom" (i.e., the Seven Sages) to engage in the "affairs of the state."[46] Hippias says it must be because "they were weak and unable to carry their good sense successfully" into the private and public domains.[47] Socrates continues by asking Hippias whether skills—and particularly "the skill of the sophists"—automatically improve from one generation to another. The orator agrees that older generations are less competent than him and his contemporaries, but he also reassures Socrates that he admires the ancients nonetheless.[48] The primary motive for this admiration is not respect, but the fear of "the wrath of the dead." Hippias does not want to incur any harm, and so "praises" the ancients, much like one would donate to charity not because he cares about the charity's work, but because he does not want to be perceived as miserly.

Socrates continues to lead on the orator by alluding to the financial accomplishments of Gorgias, Prodicus, and other successful sophists. Hippias heeds Socrates' false equivalence

[43] 281a.
[44] 281b.
[45] Ibid.
[46] 281c.
[47] 281d.
[48] Hippias (and Socrates) seems oblivious to the implication that future generations will be better than him.

between money and wisdom, proudly claiming to have "made more money than any other two sophists you like put together."[49] At this point Socrates asks whether or not Sparta, Hippias' most common destination, is where he makes most of his fortune. Hippias' denial forces him to explain why the Spartans refuse to pay him, even though his wisdom is so admirable. After a series of assents to Socrates' insistence that the Spartans are committed to improving themselves and their children, and that they would therefore be willing to recompense a wise man who promises to help them in that regard, Hippias identifies the cause of the Spartans' unwillingness to pay him with their "ancestral tradition" that "forbids them from to change their laws, or to give their sons any education contrary to established customs."[50] An excursus follows on the relationship between law and "what is beneficial" (ὠφελείας).[51] Socrates claims that lawmakers make laws as the greatest good (ὡς ἀγαθὸν μέγιστον) of the city. If what is more beneficial is also what is more lawful, and if Hippias' speeches are really beneficial, why would the Spartans deny Hippias the privilege to educate their young? Socrates' implication is that Hippias' teachings are not nearly as beneficial as the orator claims, and that the Spartans' reluctance to have him assume the official role of pedagogue shows exactly that: "Then the Spartans are breaking the law by not giving you money and entrusting their sons to you."[52] Either Hippias admits that the Spartans break the law, or he admits that they do not think him wise. He granted that the Spartans are most lawful.[53] He then contradicted himself by agreeing with Socrates that the Spartans break the law by not entrusting their sons to him.[54] All along, Socrates "sides" with Sparta in that he implicitly agrees with the Spartans' reluctance to recompense Hippias. Hippias,

[49] 282c-e.
[50] 284b.
[51] 284d.
[52] 285b. *Cf.*, Socrates' treatment of Ion's claims about his leadership skills (*Ion* 536e-542b).
[53] 283d.
[54] 285b.

however, does not understand that Socrates is trying to get him to admit that he is unworthy of Sparta's money and therefore, by Hippias' own standard, not wise (or at least not as wise as he thinks he is). Readers are meant to understand Socrates' insistence on the Spartans' resistance to compensate Hippias and his attempt at exposing inconsistencies between Hippias' hasty assents as an argument against the orator's self-proclaimed "wisdom," which is much more modest than Hippias implies, if it exists at all.

Yet, the Spartans allow Hippias to dwell among them and profess his putative knowledge. They do not care for "stars and movements in the sky" or "geometry" or "arithmetic" or "the functions of letters, syllables, rhythms, and harmonies."[55] They only enjoy "genealogies of heroes and men" and all things ancient history.[56] It is the Spartans' interest that prompted Hippias to learn about these topics, presumably in hopes that they might eventually recompense him. Here Hippias flaunts his skills once again: "Let me hear them once and I'll memorize fifty names."[57] Socrates tells him that the Spartans enjoy using him "the way children use old ladies" to tell stories, not exactly a compliment in the context of Spartan society, which was notoriously unforgiving of physical frailty.[58] Hippias again fails to detect the irony behind Socrates comparison. He embraces the description without protest and immediately mentions a recent appearance he made in Sparta as proof of his reputation.[59] The speech he delivered was about "what sort of activities are fine" and able to "make someone most famous" (εὐδοκιμώτατος).

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[55] 285c-d.
[56] On the significance of Hippias' descriptions of Sparta as regards the Greeks' understanding of regional identity, see Jonathan Hall, *Hellenicity: Between Ethnicity and Culture* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), 30.
[57] 285e.
[58] 286a.
[59] 286a-c. Woodruff maintained that Hippias is aware that Socrates is toying with him and decides to put up a front (*Plato:* Hippias Major [Hackett Publishing, 1982], 127: "True, Socrates makes a fool of him; but that, as we shall see, is a far cry from simply being a fool"). *Pace* Woodruff, I do not think Hippias is cognizant of Socrates' sarcasm. That gives the self-absorbed orator too much credit.

According to Hippias, the speech was "put together really finely," so much so that he was invited by his host, Eudicus, to deliver it again to a group of students. Hippias invites Socrates to attend, "and bring some more people, if they are capable of hearing and judging what is said."[60] Socrates agrees to join only "if all goes well." This passing comment should be understood in the context of the conversation that is about to ensue. Hippias and Socrates are about to embark on a discussion of the καλόν, which is supposed to shed light on the true aesthetic quality of the orator's speech and the merit of Socrates' recent aesthetic judgments. Socrates will only join if the inquiry proves fruitful; that is, if he can figure out what the fine really is.[61] The significance of Socrates' statement about the need to possess knowledge before participating in a situation that requires knowledge unfolds gradually throughout the dialogue.

After Hippias' self-congratulatory tangent, the conversation finally returns to the central theme introduced at the beginning. Socrates remembers a recent encounter with a "company," presumably of orators, where he made several judgments about the "fine or foul" nature of some speeches. He does not broach the topic in the usual manner. He tells Hippias to "answer me a short question," but he does not articulate his question directly. Rather, he introduces "someone" (the alter ego), who just recently asked him the same question he now poses Hippias: "how do you know what sorts of things are fine and foul? Look, would you be able to say what the fine

[60] 286b.

[61] The *Hippias Minor* picks up right after Hippias' performance at Phidostratus' schoolroom. Socrates is there. In this sense, the condition was met. As far as the *Hippias Major* goes, however, there is no reason to believe it was. I discuss the dialogue's conclusion below. The Socrates of the *Hippias Minor* may have agreed to attend out of politeness, and not because he thought he had finally reached an understanding of the fine—quite the contrary. The *Hippias Minor* begins with a much more tentative Socrates who begins by expressing his curiosity about the speech and his willingness to learn more. This Socrates has internalized the alter ego's reminder that he does not know the differences between fine and foul speeches.

is?"[62] This question opens the dialogue's main act. From this moment onwards, the alter ego is almost always present. He even gets the last question.

As soon as the question about the καλόν is introduced, Socrates offers to "become the man as best as [he] can and try to question you."[63] Thus begins Socrates' identification with the alter ego. Eventually, Socrates states that the alter ego is "Sophroniscus' son"; that is, Socrates himself.[64] Ancient readers would have likely understood Socrates' identification, to which Hippias seems to remain oblivious.[65] Although Socrates' comment is one of the most telling details about the alter ego, it only comes towards the end, after a long series of more or less direct descriptions.[66] Hippias first labels the alter ego as an "uneducated" (ἀπαίδευτός) person who "dare[s] in an august proceeding to speak such vulgar speech that way."[67] This statement appears after a question about whether or not a fine pot counts as a fine thing. Hippias struggles to understand the difference between a fine object and "the fine itself," a distinction that underpins the entire dialogue. Socrates plays along, calling the absent questioner "not elegant, but vulgar" and "garbage."[68] He also says the alter ego "cares about nothing but the truth" (τὸ ἀληθές).[69] When Hippias dodges Socrates' question about the fine pot by commenting on the questioner's poor manners, Socrates reminds him that, boorish though he is, the alter ego must "nevertheless be answered" (ἀποκριτέον).[70] The problem with the fine pot is that even the finest

[62] 286d. I will refer to the alter ego in the third person singular for clarity's sake, though, of course, it is Socrates speaking.
[63] 287b.
[64] 298c.
[65] See Woodruff, Hippias Major, 108; Trivigno, "Literary and Moral Character," 58-59. *Cf. Gorgias* 448b, where Polus understands the reference to the famous painter Polygnotus, brother of Aristophon.
[66] The other telling detail—that the alter ego lives in Socrates' house—comes even later (304d).
[67] 289d.
[68] 288d and 289d.
[69] 288d.
[70] Ibid.

pot appears foul when compared with a fine girl. The finest of girls, in turn, appears foul when compared to the gods, and so on.[71] The examples of fine things Hippias offers turn out to be both fine and foul. Socrates says the alter ego would laugh at them.[72] New, better answers are needed. But Hippias still cannot understand the alter ego's insistence on identifying "the fine." He perceives this insistence as evidence that the alter ego is simple-minded (εὐηθέστατος).[73] Socrates tells Hippias that he "has no experience" of this man, who is incredibly persistent.[74] He cannot accept those answers. In fact, he will jeer.[75]

Socrates and Hippias eventually settle on a first definition of the καλόν, articulated by the orator: "whatever is appropriate to each thing makes the particular thing fine."[76] Another question then arises about whether or not a figwood spoon would be more appropriate to stir a bean soup than a golden one.[77] Hippias again feels upset, so he calls the alter ego "an ignoramus" (ἀμαθής). Socrates continues to entertain the orator's frustration: "Oh, he's a real plague, Hippias."[78] Shortly after, Socrates describes the alter ego as violent: "if he happens to have a stick, and I don't run and run away from him, he'll try to give me a thrashing."[79] Hippias is baffled: "What? Is the man your owner (δεσπότης) or something? Do you mean he could do that and not be arrested or convicted?" Socrates goes on to explain that the law does not allow beatings, though he believes the alter ego would have a right to hit him. To explain why he

[71] 289b.
[72] 289c.
[73] 289e.
[74] Ibid.
[75] 290a.
[76] 290d.
[77] 290e.
[78] Ibid.
[79] 292a.

thinks so, Socrates once again assumes a questioning stance, reassuring Hippias that the alter ego's "harsh and grotesque" words are only directed at him, and not at the orator.[80]

Attention shifts again to the central inquiry through the alter ego, who asks Hippias whether or not it is fine for gods to memorialize their parents as it is for humans. If it is not, as Hippias admits, honorable burials cannot count as a satisfactory explanation of "the fine." While they are fine for men, they are not fine for gods. The question upsets Hippias once more: "These questions the man asks, Socrates, are inauspicious" (οὐδ' εὔφημα).[81]

Right before identifying the alter ego as Sophroniscus' son, Socrates describes him as a "tough man" and, more importantly, as the "the person I would be most ashamed to babble at, or pretend to say something when I'm not saying anything."[82] When Hippias criticizes Socrates for failing to "look at the entireties of things," Socrates responds by thanking the orator for his admonitions, which "are a help to us (ἡμᾶς)."[83] Finally, before Hippias' last remarks, Socrates says that "it's not proper (θέμις) to disagree with a man [i.e., the alter ego] when he's right (ὀρθῶς)."[84] This statement about propriety is multivalent. Θέμις connotes law, custom, and even oracular decrees. Socrates is laying down a precept—never disagree with a right judgment—that controverts Hippias' emphasis on answers based on custom and popular opinion, while also implying that this precept is worthy of becoming a custom, though evidently it is not one yet. The precept is universal, in that it reflects Socrates' commitment to continuous inquiry into the

[80] 292c.
[81] 293a. Loeb: "not even respectful to religion"; Woodruff: "sacrilegious." Although Woodruff's translation carries unnecessarily strong connotations, the phrase may be taken as offending Hippias' religious sensitivities. Coupled with the orator's statements about praising the dead to avoid their wrath, this reaction accentuates Hippias' self-serving concerns. He is concerned that the dead will unleash their wrath against him, much like he is concerned to speak about inappropriate topics that might disappoint the gods.
[82] 298a-b.
[83] 301b-c. The rest of the sentence is also in the first person plural.
[84] 304a.

truth. But the conclusion to which it refers can only be temporary. The alter ego is only right insofar as he showed why Socrates and Hippias' statement is contradictory. He stressed a contradiction in a previous claim, but he did not make any claim of his own. To arrive at a positive pronouncement, the inquiry must go on. The alter ego's objections serve as a springboard for further arguments. But they, too, must be subject to scrutiny.

The dialogue ends in a stalemate. Hippias no longer wants to participate. He announces the conversation's imminent end with another attack, this time against Socrates, not unlike his criticism of the fragmentary nature of Socrates' method of inquiry.[85] The orator has had enough. He even repudiates the hard-won negative insights he and Socrates agreed to have gained along the way. In fact, he wants to go back to "presenting a speech well and finely" to ensure successful defense of himself, his property, and his friends. He exhorts Socrates to follow his lead, give up small talk, and avoid being perceived as a fool who blabbers nonsense.

Socrates gets the last word, which consists of a series of statements about the alter ego. If he listens to the alter ego, Socrates notes, he receives criticisms from people like Hippias, who dislike what they believe is a trivial and meaningless activity. If he entertains Hippias' elevation of speechmaking above dialogical inquiry, the alter ego unleashes its powers, making Socrates feel ashamed of his audacity to profess knowledge. It turns out that the alter ego "has always been refuting" Socrates. He "happens to be a close relative of [Socrates], and he lives in the same house."[86] Whenever Socrates goes home and the alter ego detects hints of judgments à la Hippias, he asks if Socrates is not ashamed (αἰσχύνομαι) to discuss fine activities even though he is clearly ignorant about the fine. Wherever he looks, Socrates finds "insults and blame." Far from discouraging, however, they are worth enduring, not only when they come from the alter

[85] 304b.
[86] 304d.

ego, but also when they come from Hippias: "perhaps it is necessary to bear all that, for it would not be strange if I benefitted from it. So it seems to me, Hippias, that I have benefitted from conversation with both of you."[87]

Three things have emerged thus far. First, Socrates and Hippias' characterizations of the alter ego depict an aggressive, derisive, and fear-inducing figure. The alter ego is always ready to jeer whenever he deems an answer inadequate or even silly. He is vigilant, wary of any missteps, prepared to issue vigorous criticisms.[88] Second, the alter ego plays a central role in the inquiry. He is present throughout most of the dialogue, introduces crucial questions that pivot the inquiry, and even issues the last question. Third, the alter ego's role is not limited to the dialogue. Socrates insinuates that the alter ego is always active—he is always refuting. We are thus dealing with a rudimentary but clearly defined personality who plays a ubiquitous role in Socrates' thinking mind. We now turn to the affective consequences of this role, which suggest that thinking like Socrates entails a continuous willingness to endure disorienting paralysis, accompanied by the resolve to overcome that paralysis.

IV. Socrates' Inner Dialogue

Socrates' first reaction to the alter ego unfolds in four stages: (1) paralysis, (2) anger, (3) self-reproach, and (4) resolve.[89] When the alter ego asked, "insolently" (ὑβριστικῶς),[90] about

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[87] 304e.

[88] E.g., 292d, where the alter ego describes Socrates as one "with no ears and no brain" (μήτε ὦτα μήτ' ἐγκέφαλον ἔχων).

[89] 286d.

[90] Hubris is a charged term in both myth and law, two subjects about which Hippias is allegedly an expert. It is the first word that describes the alter ego, immediately accentuating Hippias' perception of him as an enemy worth defeating. For discussion on hubris in Athenian law, see Nick Fisher, "The Law of Hubris in Athens," in *Nomos: Essays in Athenian Law, Politics and Society*, eds. Paul Cartledge, Paul Millett, and Stephen Todd, 123-138 (Cambridge University Press, 1990); see also David Phillips, "Hubris and the Unity of Greek law," in *Symposion: Papers on Greek and Hellenistic Legal History* (2014): 75-98.

Socrates' professed knowledge of the differences between "fine and foul" speeches, Socrates got "stuck" in aporia (ἠπορούμην); he became unable "to answer him properly." Note that the alter ego's question arose while Socrates was still with his company. This sequence of events suggests that the alter ego was active during Socrates' interaction with the people in the gathering.[91] It matters not whether the alter ego interjected while Socrates was speaking, interjected once Socrates had finished speaking, or interjected before Socrates spoke.[92] Either way, the alter ego was active during an interpersonal interaction, monitoring and checking Socrates as soon as he made a judgment he deemed inadequate.

Socrates' inability to answer betrayed a gap between his professed knowledge and his actual knowledge. The recognition that his actual knowledge did not match his professed knowledge prompted Socrates to leave the gathering in anger (ὠργιζόμην). Was he angry at himself because the alter ego showed him that whatever he said was wrong, or at least dubious? Or did he become upset because he failed to abide by a self-imposed standard? One could argue that Socrates' anger stemmed from fearing the damage to his reputation his statements might incur. Even though the alter ego's question originated in the privacy of Socrates' mind, it refers to suggestions Socrates expressed to a group. But Socrates does not seem concerned with *losing* a reputation. Rather, he is concerned with *gaining* one. Socrates' interlocutors might have thought his answers accurate, or at least insightful, attributing to him a certain degree of knowledge that he now knows does not belong to him, thanks to the alter ego.

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[91] Some of them must have been orators. An analogous episode opens the *Hippias Minor*, which follows the *Hippias Major* chronologically. Socrates is still reluctant to judge the content of Hippias' speech, whose delivery Hippias announces at the end of the preamble in the *Hippias Major* (286c). Presumably, Socrates is talking to himself, both during the performance and when he is asked to speak about it.

[92] The last option seems unlikely. The adverb ὡς could be temporal ("when" or "while") or causal ("since" or "because").

Not only did Socrates leave the company in anger; he also "reproached" (ὠνείδιζον) himself (ἐμαυτῷ). We are not told what Socrates told himself. It is as if Socrates is referring to himself as separate from the alter ego. Physically, they are the same, as readers who may hesitate to identify one with the other immediately will soon discover. Psychically, however, they represent two entities, independent though joint. Near the dialogue's conclusion, Socrates relays to Hippias another version of the alter ego's admonishing question, which offers a glimpse into Socrates' self-reproach: "How are you to know whose speech—or any other action—is finely presented or not, when you do not know what the fine is?"[93] The reproach, then, is not in the alter ego's question, be it the one he voices or the silent one he asked in Socrates' anecdote. The insolent question instigates reproach, but the reproach is a response to the question and is thus sequentially posterior to the alter ego's query. This dynamic accentuates the unitary multiplicity of Socrates' thinking mind, which I expound below in relation to conscience.

The fourth and last stage of Socrates' reaction is a "threatening resolve" (ἠπείλουν), analogous to the resolve Socrates expresses in the *Apology*.[94] The *Hippias Major* lacks the narrative structure of Socrates' defense, but the gist is the same: "whomever of you wise men I met *first*, I would listen and learn and study, then return to the questioner and fight the argument back."[95] The alter ego's questions force Socrates to recognize his ignorance. This recognition leads to a commitment to "learn and study" from "wise men"; that is, to engage others in conversation. This statement is double-sided. Socrates genuinely wants to learn. As he

[93] 304e.
[94] 21b-c. One wonders whether his "method" underpinned his pre-oracular career or began only after the oracle's pronouncement. That the oracle should deem Socrates the wisest man alive suggests he had already built a reputation for himself, presumably as a philosopher, or an inquirer more generally. Perhaps, Socrates earned his pre-oracular reputation by speaking with young, inexperienced men like Lysis and Menexenus, and, after receiving news of the oracle, decided to seek out so-called experts. In any case, his method's force does not seem to fully emerge until after the oracle's pronouncement.
[95] 286d.

recognizes in the *Apology*, however, there are not many wise men around. Indeed, there are none. By implying that Hippias belongs with the "wise men," Socrates is also letting the orator believe in his self-proclaimed wisdom. Socrates affirms his commitment to inquiry as he lets readers know that he is unlikely to find what he is looking for in Hippias, while also tooting the orator's horn and motivating him to stick around and talk with Socrates. The attempt is nonetheless worth a try.

Whereas in the *Apology* Socrates' commitment to inquiry stems from an external assertion about his status as a wise man and the possession of knowledge that status entails, the Socrates of the *Hippias Major* wants to undertake inquiry because of an internal tension sparked by his own self, a distinction that makes the latter dialogue unique. Socrates wants to "return to the questioner" and defeat him with better arguments. He wants to be better prepared to face his alter ego to avoid being refuted (ἐξελεγχθεὶς) a second time and appearing "ridiculous" (γελώτα).[96] Socrates tells Hippias that he does not want to be refuted a "second time" because he framed the alter ego as a stranger he had met for the first time during the meeting in question. Eventually, readers realize that his concern with self-refutation is permanent. The alter ego is Socrates. He is with him wherever he goes.[97]

Socrates' four-stage response has several implications. First, it stresses a basic similarity between Socrates and his interlocutors. Socrates' questions can provoke perplexity in him just like they perplex his conversation partners. Socrates occasionally admits that he is as much a victim of himself as his interlocutors, though we do not need explicit admissions to realize that one of the affective states behind his will to question is confusion, or uncertainty, about a given

[96] 286e.
[97] See page 24.

topic.[98] If the *Apology* suggests that this perplexity is an inevitable consequence of Socrates' attempts to ascertain external claims about his status, the *Hippias Major* shows its internal genesis. Perplexity stems from Socrates' dialogical thinking; it is built into the Socratic mind. The initial effect of Socrates' internal dialogue, then, is the same as the initial effect he has on his interlocutors.[99]

If paralysis is inextricable from interlocutors' reactions to Socratic inquiry, anger, self-reproach, and resolve are not. Anger does often arise from Socrates' insistent probing, but it is not ubiquitous.[100] The same goes for self-reproach, which seems even rarer. Seldom, if ever, does an interlocutor express self-reproach at his own ignorance.[101] Resolve, and especially verbal expressions thereof, is also a rare reaction.[102] The same can be said of Socrates, but only about anger and self-reproach. Neither is always present in his reactions to recognitions of his own ignorance, nor do they seem necessary for him to reach resolve: the fourth, defining step.[103] To varying degrees, paralysis is shared by Socrates and all his interlocutors. Few, if any, share his resolve to pursue allegedly wise people in the name of learning. But the resolve is always there. It is the defining feature that distinguishes Socrates' conscience from intimations of the same conscience in others. In light of these qualifications, I suggest we understand the philosophical conscience depicted by Socrates' interactions with the alter ego as a conscience predicated on the

[98] E.g., the torpedo fish in *Meno* 80c.
[99] Every interlocutor can be said to experience perplexity, but not everyone experiences anger. For example, Euthyphro's reaction is best explained as fear, compounded by the trial, where his participation is predicated on his professed knowledge of piety.
[100] E.g., Polus and Callicles in the *Gorgias*.
[101] In the *Meno*, reproach is directed at Socrates and frees the ground for the memorable torpedo fish analogy.
[102] The young Alcibiades in *First Alcibiades* does admit his ignorance, and he even expresses resolve to follow Socrates' steps and embrace the philosophical life.
[103] More can be said about Socrates' reactions to his admissions of ignorance, both the ones he issues by himself (e.g., *Apology*) and the ones he comes to during or after interpersonal conversations.

willingness to undergo paralysis and the resolve to overcome that paralysis. In other words, Socrates' philosophical conscience would not function without these two affects. Insofar as he is able to elicit paralysis in his interlocutors, Socrates facilitates the emergence of their own philosophical conscience. The diversity of intermediate experiences between paralysis and resolve can be explained by the dramatic context of a given dialogue. In the case of the *Hippias Major*, Socrates' mention of anger and self-reproach plays into his characterization of the alter ego as a fear-inducing figure, which in turn motivates Hippias to sustain the inquiry despite his various resistances.[104] We shall now discuss how exactly it motivates Hippias, and then turn to the alter ego's multivalence.

V. The Alter Ego's Multivalence

In an effort to get beyond the dialogue's many interpretive impasses, Ludlam questioned "what benefit is derived from labelling the Questioner in terms of Socrates, rather than as a character in its own right."[105] A few pages later, however, he noted that "Socrates replicates himself (The Questioner)" as an incentive for Hippias to engage his questions.[106] This unexplained contradiction betrays a hesitant resistance against the more intuitive reading of the alter ego as Socrates' double. To say that the alter ego is a "character in its own right" neglects the obvious fact that this "character" is Socrates' creation through and through. Since Ludlam is committed to studying the dialogue as a siloed text, this attempt to separate Socrates from the alter ego also fails to recognize a second, more significant insight. The alter ego is not only Socrates' creation, like every other absent questioner. It is also a reflection of Socrates' mind. As

[104] That is, his resistance to inquiry, expressed in his wish to find quick answers, and his resistance to being questioned, which could potentially undermine his self-proclaimed wisdom.
[105] Hippias Major, 63.
[106] Ibid., 71.

such, Socrates' interactions with him illustrate an internal dynamic that represents Socrates' thinking. In fact, I am suggesting the alter ego is the best representation of that dynamic. *Pace* Ludlam, separating Socrates from the alter ego precludes this relationship and thus fails to fully appreciate the alter ego's value.

That said, Socrates uses the alter ego as a pedagogic device. In Franco Trivigno's formulation, the alter ego is "a dialectical strategy for provoking Hippias out of his strategy of agreement," understood as the orator's aversion to question-based refutation in favor of gaining assent by "saying what everyone thinks."[107] Shortly after he proposes a "fine girl" as an example of "the fine," Hippias notes that "everyone who hears you will testify that you're right."[108] By Hippias' logic, a fine girl is universally appreciated as a fine object. Citing it as an example of the fine would therefore appease "everyone" and do away with the need to continue inquiring.[109] This is an appeal to the *mos maiorum*, an uncritical adoption of popular opinion. Opinion, or judgment, is the antithesis of inquiry; it ends conversation between and within individuals, as the *Sophist* and the *Theaetetus* remind us. To circumvent Hippias' strategy and open a path to inquiry, Socrates introduces the alter ego as an enemy: "Very well said, Hippias—*if* we defeat the man!"[110] This characterization is accentuated by the use of χειρωσόμεθα, a forceful verb that connotes mastery, subjugation, and imprisonment. At 291e, Socrates again portrays the alter ego as a target of violence: "we didn't hit the man (τοῦ ἀνδρὸς οὐ τυγχάνομεν), and now he'll certainly laugh at us harder than ever."

[107] "Literary and Moral Character," 49.
[108] 288a.
[109] Hippias repeats his desire to overcome the need for argument several times (e.g., 287b, 291b).
[110] 287a.

Once he has framed him as an enemy, Socrates continues to preface challenges to Hippias' claims as questions made by the alter ego.[111] These characterizations help Socrates redirect towards the alter ego the anger that Hippias would likely feel towards him. To be sure, Hippias appears vexed several times.[112] He even admits that he "wouldn't talk (διαλεγοίμην) with a man who asked things like that."[113] However, his vexation never jeopardizes the inquiry.[114] It is never strong enough to convince Hippias to stop talking to Socrates, or to flee the scene à la Euthyphro.[115] Even when Hippias issues his final statement about the futility of dialogical inquiry, his tone is civil, though uncompromising. But that is precisely a sign that the alter ego has been effective. Socrates portrays a vulgar, insolent, and aggressive figure to get the orator on his side. Indeed, Hippias seems more concerned with defeating the alter ego than with finding adequate answers about the καλόν.

If the alter ego becomes a target for Hippias to redirect his anger and use it as fuel for inquiry, it also serves the "useful function of enabling Socrates to attack Hippias indirectly."[116] Socrates begins confronting Hippias from the get-go. He takes subtle jabs at the orator's self-aggrandizing rhetoric about his success across Greece through ironic praises followed by

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[111] E.g., 288d, 289c.
[112] E.g., 290e, 291a, 291e-292a, 293a.
[113] 291a.
[114] One passage where Hippias does show mild frustration towards Socrates is 301b, where the orator criticizes Socrates' method of inquiry as unreasonable, unobservant, foolish, and uncomprehending. Socrates immediately diffuses the tension by pointing out that "That's the way things are for us (Τοιαῦτα, ὦ Ἱππία, τὰ ἡμέτερά ἐστιν)." He continues by thanking Hippias for his reproach: "your frequent admonitions are a help to us (σὺ ἡμᾶς ὀνίνης ἀεὶ νουθετῶν)." The proximity of σὺ and ἡμᾶς evokes a direct contrast between Hippias, on the one hand, and Socrates and the alter ego, on the other. The "we" may also be read as a more general statement about "people like us," which Socrates reiterates more explicitly in his parting words: "others around here" question him, presumably as relentlessly as the alter ego (304d).
[115] So Trivigno: "if Socrates had been overtly abusive with Hippias, it is unlikely that Hippias would have stuck around to endure it. In short, the device, along with the healthy dose of praise, keeps Hippias coming back for more" ("Literary and Moral Character," 49). The comparison with Euthyphro is loose. Euthyphro's reaction once he realizes that he may not know much about piety after all seems better characterized as one of fear and shame rather than anger.
[116] Woodruff, Hippias Major, 43-44, 97-98, 107.

inquiries that cleverly reiterate those praises while calling their premises into question. This ruse continues once the alter ego enters the scene. Now, Socrates can up the stakes, using the alter ego to issue direct criticisms that undermine Hippias' professed knowledge time and again. If Socrates had been overtly confrontational, Hippias would have most likely refused to listen to him, just like he said he would refuse to talk to a man who asked such bizarre, intrusive, and inappropriate questions.[117] But the man is not there, so Hippias continues to talk to Socrates.

The alter ego's criticisms of Hippias (and Socrates) all seek to pivot the conversation towards universal definitions. This insistence on definitions led Olson to suggest that the alter ego represents the ideal Socratic interlocutor.[118] Like Socrates, this ideal interlocutor is committed to reasoning earnestly without fear of damaging his reputation. This commitment is partly evident in the content of his interventions, which demonstrate a concern with abstract universals ("the fine itself") over contingent particulars ("the beautiful girl," "the golden spoon"). At first, Hippias is unable to appreciate the difference, hence his suggestions that such context-dependent examples as a fine girl and a golden spoon should count as satisfactory answers. Eventually, Hippias demonstrates a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between particulars and universals. Hippias seems to make some progress towards understanding the καλόν in a way that would satisfy Socrates. He tells Socrates that the answer he is looking for should say that "the fine is a sort of thing that will never appear (φανεῖται) to be foul for anyone,

[117] So Ludlam: "The Questioner, then, is a device which enables Socrates to criticize Hippias' definitions of τὸ καλόν without criticizing Hippias directly" (Hippias Major, 53).
[118] Olson, "Socrates Talks," 265-287. Olsen suggests that the conversation between Socrates and the alter ego is unlike any other conversation in the "puzzled" dialogues, which I take to mean the aporetic dialogues. In the *Hippias Major*, Socrates finally converses with an interlocutor who matches his abilities. *Pace* Angela Smith, the alter ego raises an objection to the claim that "Socrates' interlocutors all claimed to be experts" ("Knowledge and Expertise in the Early Platonic Dialogues," in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie 80* [1998]: 146). The alter ego never claims to be an expert. Moreover, his reproach of Socrates stems from Socrates' pretense of expertise, which the alter ego undermines several times throughout the dialogues.

anywhere, at any time." Note that Hippias still alludes to appearance. The fine is anything that never *appears* to be foul. Yet, the three absolute adverbs (μηδέποτε, μηδαμοῦ, μηδενὶ) echo the kind of universal definition Socrates and the alter ego might deem acceptable. Hippias' next example moves away from mundane particulars to honor and health, though he also mentions wealth, funerals, and burials. Socrates immediately reminds the orator that his new (and final) answer still does not work. The alter ego "will laugh at us now more than ever." Nonetheless, Hippias has shown a keener appreciation for a distinction to which he was completely oblivious at the inquiry's beginning.

Reading Hippias as a simple fool is therefore simplistic.[119] Ramos has usefully framed the orator's intellectual development as analogous to the philosopher's ascent in the *Symposium*.[120] In his estimation, Hippias' answers to Socrates' queries about the καλόν—in order: a beautiful girl, gold, appropriateness, and a well-lived human life—correspond to Diotima's scheme.[121] The orator occasionally shows signs of improvement, suggesting that Socrates has been effective, at least insofar as his effectiveness can be assessed by noticing a progression in Hippias' answers.[122] Yet, we might deflate Ramos' account by pointing out that the dialogue's conclusion undermines all the progress Hippias has made. Despite Hippias' apparent progress, his concluding remarks issue a staunch denial of the value of dialogue and a repudiation of any hard-won negative insight he and Socrates agreed to have gained along the

[119] Woodruff reads Hippias as a perceptive and hyper-aware interlocutor, as demonstrated by Hippias' alleged awareness of Socrates' irony. Woodruff suggests Hippias displays and takes advantage of this awareness from the very beginning, even though there are no clear signs that he does. This is an equally simplistic interpretation, for it fails to appreciate the palpable differences between the two interlocutors, including their implications in terms of conscience. *Cf.*, Woodruff, Hippias Major, note 157, 81, and note 173, 85; Ludlam, Hippias Major, 57.
[120] Ramos, "Socratic *Mimēsis*," 81-84.
[121] *Symposium* 211a.
[122] *Cf.*, 291d, 300e-301a. His definition of the fine as appropriate at 290d is noteworthy, as is his critique of Socrates at 301b. Both betray a refinement we might not expect at the outset.

way. This repudiation seems more vehement than any other of his criticisms: "philosophy" is a confusing waste of time.

Hippias' skepticism against Socrates' philosophical approach is apparent throughout the dialogue. Early on, Hippias reassures Socrates that "I could teach you to answer much harder things than that so no human being could refute you."[123] The implication is that he could learn the truth about the καλόν and "tell [Socrates] more precisely than any preciseness" if he "went off and looked for it by myself in solitude (εἰς ἐρημίαν)"; that is, without conversation.[124] Long suggested we read this as an allusion to Hippias' own internal dialogue, which seems correct given Hippias' use of σκεψαίμην, which denotes thinking, reflection, or even contemplation.[125] We should not assume, however, that Hippias' inner dialogue has the potential to reach the same insights as Socrates'. Even though we never get a direct glimpse of what Hippias' internal dialogue looks like, we can surmise that Hippias' conversation with himself would not be very productive, when judged by Socrates' standard. Hippias' confidence stems precisely from his inability to appreciate the need for rigorous and consistent self-questioning. At 297e, Hippias again reassures Socrates that he will find an answer as soon as he looks by himself; he just has not looked yet. He does admit that, as it stands, he has no answers, but his confidence suggests that he is still not receptive to the kind of method Socrates wants him to adopt.[126] He is sure of his ability to know the truth. Socrates sarcastically reassures Hippias that he will "easily find it, I think, when you're alone."[127] If to Hippias that is a compliment, to Socratically-inclined readers

[123] 287b.
[124] *Cf.*, 295a.
[125] 297e. See Long, *Conversation and Self-Sufficiency*, 63.
[126] So Trivigno: "While Hippias does admit to being perplexed and disoriented by the argument, he does not take this to mean that he cannot answer the question (297e 1–2). In short, while he recognizes his failure in the argument, he does not recognize his epistemic failure, i.e. his ignorance" ("Literary and Moral Character," 55).
[127] 295b.

it would almost seem an insult. The main point of dialogical inquiry is that answers to philosophical questions are not easily obtainable, hence the need for laborious investigation. Inquiry is "easy" when it ends quickly; that is, when a judgment is reached. Socrates' most memorable reminder that one should not look for the easy way out comes at the end ("fine things are difficult"), though similar implicit allusions appear throughout.[128] Hippias may be ascending until he plunges right back to the starting point, but he also resists the ascent at every step.

Ramos is also correct in suggesting that the dialogue's conclusion is a good example of Socrates' philosophical activity as a political activity with potentially dangerous (or even tragic) consequences for the philosopher.[129] The tension is not only between Hippias' "authoritarian epistemological position" based on limitless self-confidence and Socrates' "radicalism."[130] We can go further—the conflict is between two mental constitutions: Socrates' philosophical conscience and Hippias' "non-philosophical" outlook, which hinges on a seemingly impervious self-regard spiced by the sophist's claim to excellence in any activity.[131] Although Hippias' performance in the dialogue makes it difficult to see how his mental constitution could give way to the other, we should not completely discount that possibility. It is possible that, in isolated reflection, Hippias would do better now that he is being acquainted with Socrates and his demanding alter ego than he would before this acquaintance. If that were *not* the case, it would thoroughly discount Socrates' power. Hippias may not have a philosophical conscience yet, but Socrates' implicit suggestion that one should develop one's thinking by self-refutation is a powerful one, even for one initially so disinclined as Hippias. Ultimately, the orator will have to

[128] 304e.
[129] Santiago Ramos, "The *Hippias Major*."
[130] Ibid.
[131] We could name Hippias' outlook "sophistic" or "conventional." The point is that it represents a different type of disposition towards speech, and, by implication, a different type of mental disposition.

foster in himself the willingness to accept paralysis and a corollary resolve to overcome it. He may not have done so yet, but he has been exposed to one (two!) figures who have, and has even shown promising signs. That must count for something.

VI. Hannah Arendt, the Alter Ego, and the Socratic Conscience

We are now ready to examine the implications of our findings in relation to "conscience." Arendt used the term to denote the dialogical nature of thinking, an activity that, in her estimation, precludes judgment and action. Before turning to Arendt's reading of the *Hippias Major*, brief contextual remarks are in order. My aim is not to appraise her positions. I only wish to situate Arendt's reading with respect to her broader arguments.

Arendt treated the alter ego in "Thinking and Moral Considerations," which was originally presented as a lecture. The essay begins with remarks on the "banality of evil," which Arendt first observed at the Eichmann trials, where she made the controversial observation that Eichmann's monstrous deeds stemmed not from wicked motives but from a profound "inability to think."[132] Could the activity of thinking condition individuals against committing evil? For Arendt, the answer is a soft "yes." She suggested that thinking is a human *need*, which has endured and will endure so long as "more urgent needs of living" do not preclude it.[133] Thinking may satisfy a need, but it produces no tangible results.[134] Not only does thinking have no tangible results; its engagement with invisible objects (e.g., "the fine") also disrupts daily life: "Doing and living in the most general sense of *inter homines esse*, 'being among my fellow-men' […] positively prevents thinking."[135] To put it the other way, for Arendt thinking prevents doing and

[132] "Thinking and Moral Considerations," 417.
[133] Ibid., 420.
[134] Ibid., 422.
[135] Ibid., 423.

living in the most general sense, as Alcibiades' vignette of Socrates might illustrate. The paralysis of thought is thus twofold: thinking interrupts all other activities, and it further freezes those involved once ignorance becomes manifest.[136]

This twofold paralysis is related to thinking's "self-destructive" nature. Thinking continuously undermines the foundations it tries to build. Like Penelope's web, judgments are bound to be unraveled, examined, and thus destroyed, even if only partially. Therefore "we cannot expect any moral propositions or commandments, no final code of conduct from the thinking activity, least of all a new and now allegedly final definition of what is good and what is evil."[137] Arendt thus wondered whether "anything relevant for the world we live in" can ever arise "out of so resultless an enterprise" as thinking.[138] The answer cannot be in doctrines, which are judgments destined for revision. Rather, Arendt suggested we look for traces of experiences that indicate what it means to think, and what thinking might do for us. Enter Socrates—a "representative" for the average thinking subject by virtue of his reluctance to act and proclaim doctrines.

Arendt deemed Socrates' encounter with the alter ego an "encounter of the self with itself."[139] She spoke of the "soundless dialogue" in the *Theaetetus* as the activity that "actualizes the difference within [Socrates'] identity" and "results in conscience as its by-product."[140] Conscience *is* inner dialogue: "No man can keep his conscience intact who cannot actualize the

[136] Ibid., 434.
[137] Ibid., 425.
[138] Ibid., 426. I do not think Arendt is expressing skepticism about philosophy per se. Rather, she is lamenting the status of philosophy at the time of writing. Undermined internally (by positivism) and externally (by prejudice against its purpose), philosophy had, and perhaps still has, nothing going for it, except that, at least according to Arendt, it is the only discipline predicated on thinking *qua* inner dialogue, which seems to be its only but vital contribution to human life.
[139] Ibid., 443.
[140] Ibid., 446.

dialogue with himself."[141] However, conscience differs from consciousness.[142] The latter denotes one's awareness of one's existence. This awareness splits the conscious subject into two: the subject who is aware and the object of which it is aware, which happens to be the subject. Thinking adds a new dimension to this unitary multiplicity. Thinking unfolds when the subject *qua* subject and the subject *qua* object converse with each other.[143] The latter thus ceases to exist as a mere object and becomes a subject in its own right. The alter ego's presence mimics this transformation. When Socrates describes the alter ego to Hippias, it is relegated to the status of object. In those moments, Socrates and Hippias are the subjects, the alter ego the object of their statements. When Socrates mentions what the alter ego tells him in private, the alter ego regains the status of subject, in that the dynamic out of which his remarks emerge is a private, internal one where soundless dialogue reifies the subject's unitary multiplicity.[144] In conversation, the two identical entities assert their independence in more concrete terms than mere perception. This independence is always predicated on an ineluctable unity. The alter ego is Socrates' "close relative" who "lives in the same house." He is always ready to doubt, question, refute. Yet, there is still no positive outcome. Thinking, for Arendt, is a self-castigating asceticism out of which only an impasse can ensue. The web is never finished, and Penelope gains nothing with every new day.

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[141] Hannah Arendt, "Socrates," in *The Promise of Politics*, ed. Jerome Kohn (Schocken Books, 2005), 25.
[142] I say "consciousness" because it is the word Arendt uses to denote being conscious of oneself. This usage conflates consciousness *qua* perception with self-consciousness *qua* perception of oneself, a conflation that betrays Arendt's idealist footing. As long as by "consciousness" we understand self-consciousness (unmediated by discourse), the claim still proves useful to understand what Socrates does when he thinks.
[143] More can be said about the role of language in this soundless dialogue. When we talk to ourselves, we do not seem to need the same degree of precise articulation interpersonal conversation requires. Inner dialogues are quick, soundless but also wordless, "intuitive," though that does not imply that meaning is lost or understanding stunted, more so than it would in interpersonal conversation.
[144] Of course, Socrates voices those remarks to Hippias and thus brings them out of the private mental sphere. They do, however, illustrate that internal dynamic.

I now want to consider two shortcomings in Arendt's reading of the alter ego, whose revision should help us better appreciate this figure's value as well as Socrates' own views of its value.[145] First, Arendt erroneously implies that the alter ego is only present when Socrates is alone. She suggests that Socrates' "'conscience' is never present except when [he is] alone,"[146] and that "the fellow Socrates is talking about has been left at home; he fears him," but only when he is in private.[147] I take "private" to denote physical solitude, hence Arendt's emphasis on the literal meaning of the "the same house." However, several moments in the dialogue suggest that the alter ego is active even when Socrates is not alone. We know, for instance, that the alter ego was active during Socrates' reported conversation with the company at the beginning of the *Hippias Major*. He intervened immediately after Socrates made an aesthetic judgment he deemed inappropriate. This intervention is the reason Socrates leaves, and it provides a dramatic bridge between the dialogue's preamble and its main act. Arendt is correct in suggesting that the alter ego is most energetic in private, hence Socrates' comments about its ubiquity and constant questioning at home. But that does not mean the alter ego only performs in moments of physical solitude. Socrates thinks with himself even while talking with and listening to others. There is no reason to suggest that the alter ego hears Socrates' unwarranted judgments *only* when Socrates goes home. Insofar as thinking is always a solitary activity by virtue of the mind's insularity, it is impossible to limit the influence of the other in our inner dialogue to moments of solitude. Thinking can unfold when we are alone just as well as when we are together.[148]

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[145] She was by no means aspiring to Plato scholarship, which may explain the suggestive but underdeveloped analysis.
[146] Ibid., 443.
[147] Ibid., 444.
[148] Of course, interpersonal conversation transposes the internal dynamic outwardly and makes soundless dialogue less frequent. But it does not preclude it. That, at least, is what I take the *Hippias Major* to suggest.

Arendt also equated the alter ego and the *daimonion*. In her first and only mention of the *daimonion*, she suggested that "even the Socratic *daimonion*, his divine voice, only tells him what *not* to do."[149] This intuitive equivalence can be partly explained by her understanding of philosophy vis à vis political theorizing. For Arendt, there is no meaningful difference between a moral conscience (the *daimonion*) and an intellectual one (the alter ego), for ultimately the only path to a positive vision of the good life is political theorizing, not philosophy.[150] *Pace* Arendt, I suggest the *daimonion* and the alter ego are meaningfully different, though their differences are not categorical.

Socrates often claims to be in contact with a "voice"[151] or "sign"[152] that has been intervening in his life since childhood. This *daimonion* has a clear divine origin.[153] In the *Apology*, Socrates likens it to other "spirits," which he calls "gods or the children of gods."[154] The same is true of the *First Alcibiades*, where he calls it "the god."[155] The *daimonion*'s divine nature does not entail divination or divine inspiration. The inspiration of an Ion deprives the subject of reason as an external entity hijacks his agentic independence. The subject becomes possessed and can no longer be said to act consciously or autonomously. This external influence produces the mad frenzy typical of poetry, making it contagious and potentially dangerous.

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[149] Ibid.
[150] This line of argument is developed in the first section of "Thinking and Moral Considerations," where Arendt treats time and again the claim that thinking (i.e., philosophical theorizing) never yields positive injunctions and is only useful in rare moments of emergency.
[151] *Apology* 31d: φωνή.
[152] *Apology* 40a; *Phaedrus* 242b: τὸ δαιμόνιόν τε καὶ τὸ εἰωθὸς σημεῖόν. See also *Euthyphro* 3b and *Theages* 128d.
[153] For a discussion of the *daimonion* as evidence of Socrates' religiosity, see Gerd Van Kiel, "Socrates' Daemon: Internalisation of the Divine and Knowledge of the Self," in *Apeiron 38*, no. 2 (2005): 31-42.
[154] 27c-d.
[155] 105e.

Socrates mentions a similar frenzy to Phaedrus as soon as the youth finishes reciting his first speech.[156]

The *daimonion* has a divine origin, but its interventions are not mutually exclusive with reason.[157] I do think, however, that it is more appropriate to associate reason with the alter ego. Ludlam saw the alter ego as an anomalous replacement of the *daimonion*: "the Socrates of the *Hippias Major* is not the Socrates of history […], if only because our Socrates introduces the Questioner at the expense of the historical daimonion."[158] This conclusion does not take into account the "daemonic luck" (δαιμόνια τις τύχη) at the end of the *Hippias Major*.[159] Hippias just issued his final critique against philosophy, which he reduced to "small-talking" that distracts from "what is fine and worth a lot: to be able to present a speech well and finely, in court or council or any other authority." Socrates' response first describes the orator as "blessed" (μακάριος) for his apparent surety about what fine activities to practice. The compliment is ironic. Socrates does not really think Hippias is blessed. Hippias' bliss depends on his professed knowledge, but Socrates does not think Hippias knows what fine activities one ought to practice, especially after probing his mind. One could object that Socrates does think Hippias is blessed because he does not have to face the destabilizing uncertainty that comes with constant doubt. As Socrates admits, however, there is value in the "insults and blame" that accompany one's willingness to doubt, question, and inquire, which are worth enduring more than the placid life of apparent and unexamined knowledge.

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[156] 234d: "following you I shared your Bacchic frenzy."
[157] "Socrates' Daemon," 34. For a thorough discussion, see Mark McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 194-197.
[158] See footnote 41.
[159] 304b-c.

Although Ludlam is right to distinguish the alter ego from the *daimonion*, the difference does not imply that the Socrates of the *Hippias Major* is not the "historical Socrates." Unlike Hippias, Socrates has to deal with daemonic luck, which "holds him back" (κατέχει).[160] Translators deflate the force of this active verb by rendering it in the passive voice, which portrays the *daimonion* as a constitutive part of Socrates' being, almost as if Socrates unleashed the daemonic luck on himself. The active voice rather posits the *daimonion* as an independent entity, a force or spirit that interacts with Socrates but is ultimately separate from him. This separation is not absolute. For one, Socrates' firsthand experience with this luck intimates a close relationship. But the *daimonion* is less clearly defined as an exclusively private entity. Its divine origins entail an association with divine entities external to Socrates' mind.[161] The fact that the dialogue's only mention of the *daimonion* is oblique further suggests a looser relationship between the *daimonion* and Socrates' mental sphere. Nevertheless, this mention does suggest a link between the alter ego and the *daimonion*.

Woodruff's proposal more aptly captures their relationship: the alter ego "is reminiscent of Socrates' *daimonion* (*Apology* 40a); but [it] has a great deal more to say than 'no.' Either, however, would prevent Socrates from declaring that he knew something he did not know."[162] The *daimonion* is almost always described as preventing Socrates from *doing* something (e.g., entering politics, training as an athlete).[163] His "no" is rarely discursive, if ever. The injunctions

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[160] Woodruff: "I'm apparently held back by my crazy luck." Fowler: "I, as it seems, am possessed by some accursed fortune."

[161] For a discussion of the *daimonion* as the voice of Apollo, see Charles Reeve, "Socrates the Apollonian?" in *Reason and Religion in Socratic Philosophy*, eds. Nicholas D. Smith and Paul B. Woodruff (Oxford University Press, 2000), 30-37; see also Christina Schefer, *Platan und Apollon: vom Logos zur ck zum Mythos* (Academia Verlag, 1996), 103-108. For a counterargument that posits the *daimonion* as an exclusively private divine force, see Van Riel, "Socrates' Daemon," 34-35.

[162] Hippias Major, note 157, 81.

[163] Occasionally, the *daimonion* even interdicts Socrates' interlocutors, though always through Socrates. E.g., *Theages* 128d-129a. The *Theages* is generally considered spurious, but it does offer the most detailed

it issues can be understood as "moral" or "practical," in that they concern behavior and have little to do with theoretical knowledge. On the contrary, the alter ego is almost exclusively concerned with propositional judgments.[164] It can thus be termed "intellectual" or "philosophical." From its first appearance to its final question, the alter ego reproaches Socrates and Hippias' failure to arrive at satisfactory judgments about the καλόν. It stresses logical inconsistencies and definitional inadequacies. If the *daimonion* is Socrates's moral conscience, the alter ego is his intellectual conscience.

These differences are not categorical.[165] They are also not as clear-cut as I may have implied. Insofar as they serve a privative function, the alter ego and the *daimonion* are essentially the same.[166] However, the *daimonion* is never characterized as a discursive force. Socrates calls it a voice, to be sure. But its contents are always concealed, a fact that can be partially explained by its divine and therefore cryptic origin.[167] In the alter ego we get a detailed depiction of

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account of the *daimonion*. I deem this account equally valuable as a description of Socrates' mind as any other account in indisputably authentic dialogues on the same grounds explained in my "Note on Authenticity" above.

[164] One could object that the alter ego also issues a privative injunction. When Socrates describes the alter ego's shocking first intervention, he says that, as a result, he "left the gathering." This implies that the alter ego had the same effect as the *daimonion*; that is, it made Socrates refrain from participating in a social activity. This the only reference that links the alter ego to action. The remaining interactions between Socrates and the alter ego all concern propositional judgments about the καλόν.

[165] *Apology* 40a-b seems to describe the *daimonion* like I have been describing the alter ego: "Yet in other speeches it often held me back as I was speaking."

[166] A noteworthy exception is in the *Phaedo* (60e), where Socrates speaks of dreams that prompted him to cultivate the arts. Although the dreams appeared in different shapes, Socrates says, they could all be condensed into one dream. At first, Socrates thought the dream was encouraging him to practice philosophy. Before his imminent death, he recognized that it could be prompting him to compose poetry instead. Either way, the dream issued a positive injunction. For discussion, see Sheldon Nahmod, "The Dream Motif in" Phaedo," in *Classics Ireland 1* (1994): 74-89.

[167] The "voice" Socrates invokes at *Phaedrus* 242c is coming from αὐτόθεν, which Van Kiel translates as "itself out of itself" ("Socrates' Daemon," 34). An equally plausible translation would be "from this very spot" (i.e., the creek). The first option echoes other mentions of the *daimonion* where Socrates clearly limits its range to his own mind. The second option, however, suggests that the voice is external to Socrates' mind. This suggestion depicts the *daimonion* as a more independent entity than usually conceived, in line, I think, with the claim that, at least occasionally, the *daimonion* is indeed described as an external divine intervention, whereas the alter ego is confined to the interior of Socrates' mind.

Socrates' thinking, which also mimics dialogical interactions with interlocutors. We could say, more generally, that the alter ego illustrates the inner workings of Socrates' mind whenever he says that that *daimonion* is speaking to him, urging him to stop doing whatever he is or is planning on doing (at least in those instances where Socrates frames his encounters with the *daimonion* as doing the most rational thing).[168]

Moreover, Arendt's commitment to a purely negative conception of thinking prevents her from appreciating the constructive dimension of Socrates' philosophical conscience. This dimension can be conceived through another comparison with the *daimonion*, whose interdictions seem less constructive. Insofar as the *daimonion*'s interventions concern physical, social, or political activities, it is more difficult to see how they bring Socrates closer to virtue.[169] Both interdict, but the alter ego's negative injunctions afford fresh possibilities for inquiry. The alter ego nixes false or contradictory judgments to nudge Socrates towards better, less unsound ones. Socrates' efforts to meet the alter ego's objections bring him closer to true judgments. There is no guarantee that his efforts will yield better, less false judgments. Sometimes a new avenue leads back to the same impasse out of which it emerged.[170] At least in principle, however, the alter ego's interventions clear the ground for new, better ideas, providing space and material for the inquiry to continue. Understanding what beauty is not, or how to know what it is not, is a lasting methodological insight of the *Hippias Major*, and one for which the alter ego is to be thanked. Out of eliminative (dia)logical analysis arise discursive formations better than their previous versions, hence Socrates' closing statement of gratitude towards Hippias and the alter ego.

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[168] E.g., *Apology* 31d.
[169] See Socrates' statement about eschewing public office and other activities the average Greek deemed duties or responsibilities (*Apology* 36b).
[170] E.g., 304a.

Insofar as the alter ego is almost exclusively concerned with propositional knowledge and theoretical judgments, its scope seems more limited than the *daimonion*'s, which ranges several activities in the moral domain narrowly conceived. In its role as Socrates' philosophical conscience, however, the alter ego is more pervasive than the *daimonion*. Socrates is only called to more or less heroic renunciations and commitments from time to time, whereas he thinks and questions nearly constantly.

VII. Conclusion

Part I contextualized my intended contribution by outlining the equivalence of thinking and dialogue in two well-known passages from the *Sophist* and the *Theaetetus*. Socrates' characterization of thinking as the soul's conversation with itself and his corollary description of judgment as the end of conversation helped define the alter ego's role as a forceful champion of conversation and an adamant enemy of judgment.

Part II turned briefly to the absent questioner in the *Meno* to underscore the alter ego's more revealing role and significance. The alter ego's physical and temperamental features were the focus of part III, while part IV outlined Socrates' 4-stage response to the alter ego, which suggests that thinking like Socrates entails a continuous willingness to endure disorienting paralysis, accompanied by the resolve to overcome that paralysis.

Part V addressed the alter ego's various functions, and especially its pedagogic role with regards to Hippias, which rescued the orator from accusations of simple-mindedness and underscored the hopeful, albeit arduous, nature of Socrates' philosophical searches and their effects on those who, like Hippias, have the potential to develop a conscience.

Part VI finally turned to Arendt's interpretation of the alter ego. I sought to extend this interpretation with a more precise treatment of the alter ego's presence before, during, and after Socrates and Hippias' conversation, a more nuanced discussion of the differences and similarities between the alter ego and the *daimonion*, and a positive conception of the philosophical conscience's constructive dimension.

More needs to be said about the *Hippias Major*'s long and disjointed preamble. The stakes are high from the very beginning, and the initial excursus on law and Sparta might assume new meaning if read as an abridged representation of the discrepancies and affinities between Socrates' philosophical conscience and Hippias' stubborn and seemingly impervious self-regard.

More precise definitions of "thinking," "intellectual," and "philosophical" would also clarify some of this thesis' central claims, and more can also be said about the interplay between fear and shame at bad arguments, Socrates' 4-stage response, and Arendt's lack of interest in Socrates' intellectualist ethics. What Arendt means by "thinking" is not exactly Socrates' thinking, though I have treated them interchangeably. Both are discursive insofar as they entail conversation, but Socrates is committed to a very specific method that hinges on logic, not quite as crude as Hippias' "flakings and clippings," but narrow and rigid enough to be slightly at odds with Arendt's main interests in ethics, which shaped her interpretation significantly.

There may also be fruitful links between the dialogue's dramatic date and its political context that might offer an additional explanation for the alter ego's presence. Given Hippias' connection to Sparta and in light of Alcibiades' misdeeds as well as Socrates' indirect involvement in them, it may be possible to account for Socrates' jabs at Hippias and his decision to distance himself from the alter ego and his claims with regard to Athenian politics.

Shortcomings notwithstanding, I hope to have shown that and how, despite its disputed authenticity, the *Hippias Major* enriches our understanding of what it means for Socrates to think with himself, and for us to think like Socrates. Arendt credited him with discovering the "possibility and importance" of the "intercourse with oneself" that enables conscience. Yet, she also thought conscience "remains a marginal affair for society at large," except in emergencies.[171] Its political and moral significance transpires only in rare moments when "The best lack all conviction, while the worst / Are full of passionate intensity."[172] Five decades later, we may wonder how rare those moments really are.[173]

[171] "Thinking and Moral Considerations," 445.
[172] William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming," in *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (Wordsworth Poetry Library, 1994), 158.
[173] I am indebted to Max Smith for helpful criticisms on earlier drafts. I am also grateful to Andrei Pop for indispensable guidance on treating Arendt's claims and for helping me bring the alter ego to life, through the text and in myself.

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